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ABSTRACT

This document presents results of a survey studying the Japanese picture book, "Hiroshima No Pika." The story aptly captures how a family of three find their lives shattered in a matter of seconds when the atomic bomb is dropped on Hiroshima (Japan) in World War II. Issues presented in the story are: (1) immediate survival in the face of a nuclear holocaust; (2) long lasting effects of radiation sickness; and (3) the impact of nuclear war. Readers must understand these issues because the view of the author, Toshi Maruki, influenced the presentation of the values and the story. In order to ascertain whether upper elementary readers were capable of identifying the issues in the book, an informal survey was conducted to record literary responses to this book. Twenty fifth graders from a semi-rural Nebraska school district completed a general survey after hearing and looking at the book. The children were not given any historical or scientific background information prior to hearing the story. Later 15 veterans volunteered to listen to and respond to the book. Comparison of the responses of both groups to the survey showed the veterans' ability to call on background knowledge and experience to interpret the issues of the story. The paper concludes that children must learn the facts rather than become confused by the opinions and myths surrounding nuclear energy. While some of the moral issues may be beyond a concrete level of intellectual development of the upper elementary child, it is important that youngsters understand the processes employed when using nuclear energy. (DK)

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Critical Analysis of a Social and Scientific Moral Dilemma :

Fifth Graders and Veterans Respond to Hiroshima No Pika

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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF A SOCIAL AND SCIENTIFIC MORAL DILEMMA: FIFTH GRADERS AND VETERANS RESPOND TO HIROSHIMA NO PIKA

Moral and social values attached to scientific discoveries have an impact on how people accept or reject the validity of the information in terms of it being an advancement for living or a detriment to the world. Frequently societal attitudes regarding a scientific find cause the development to be taken from the laboratory and thrust into the political arena. Again, a myriad of attitudes and values are assigned to a scientific discovery. Once in the public eye, the issues are then aired on television, radio, and further dissected in the print media. It is at the media level that school children are apt to over-hear or see adults in their world react to the political ramifications of the values given to a body of scientific knowledge by a population not necessarily trained in science.

One such controversial scientific issue that is at the forefront in the world political arena is nuclear energy in relation to nuclear (dis)armaments. Although children hear of such developments, there is some debate as to whether elementary age students should be exposed to or study the horrors of nuclear devastation, no matter what the grade level. One faction believes elementary children lack a conceptual foundation to understand nuclear weapons. Proponents of this view argue against informing youngsters about the effects of nuclear weapons (Jacobson, et al. 1983). However, Chwan and Roberta Snow from Educators for Social Responsibility found that "adults are unaware of the depth of children's concerns about nuclear war awareness of the world destroying potential of nuclear weapons, while the younger ones associated nuclear bombs with vivid personal imagery of death" (Yudkin, 1984, p. 22).

Escalona noted that "those children who grew up in a nuclear age differ from previous generations in that they take it for granted that it applies to all natural and social life on earth.

In this respect they are more clear-eyed and realistic than older adults" (Escalona, 1982, p. 603). If Escalona's position is realistic, then educators need to first find out how much youngsters know and/or understand about the nuclear age in which they live and what is their reaction to it. Literature aimed specifically at children may be an appropriate conveyer of fact and opinion that could be used to teach youngsters how to critically analyze the social values and issues assigned to nuclear energy, particularly that employed in (dis)armaments.

One such book is Hiroshima No Pika. Hiroshima No Pika, an historical fiction picture by Toshi Maruki, has impressive credentials. In 1983 it won the Mildred Batchelder Award for books in translation published in English in the United States. Maruki's book received an Honor distinction for the 1983 Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards and won the 1983 Jane Addams Peace Prize. Hiroshima No Pika was selected in 1983 for recommended reading in the social studies as well as being named a notable book by the American Library Association. (This title also won the Ehon Nippon Prize for the most excellent picture book in Japan.) Regardless of the controversial content and attitudes cited in the book, such literary acclaim often assures that a title such as this will be purchased to be used in the elementary classroom.

However, just winning awards does not necessarily mean that a certain story is appropriate for youngsters of all ages. The fact that Hiroshima No Pika is a thirty-two page picture book is misleading for this format is often associated with a kindergarten through second grade audience. The subject of this story, the nuclear holocaust and a family's physical and emotional reaction to it is not suited for the very young.

Maruki's story, rather, is appropriate reading for upper elementary children primarily because the focus of the book is pro-peace and anti-nuclear weapons: "It can't happen," she [the mother in the story] says, "if no one drops the bomb" (unpaged). Secondly, Hiroshima No Pika is presented through a perspective that is out of the ordinary for American school children. The bombing of Hiroshima during World War II is told from the Japanese point of view; Maruki

is sympathetic to the Japanese people. Such a position encourages questioning and critical thinking by American readers. While the narrative appears to be very simple, it is a complex combination of moral issues and emotional reactions surrounding an historical and scientific event.

Maruki aptly captures how a family of three find their lives shattered in a matter of seconds on that fateful morning of August 6, 1945. The issues presented are primarily: the immediate survival in the face of a nuclear holocaust, the long lasting effects of radiation sickness, and the impact of nuclear war. It is tantamount that readers understand these issues rather than just accept Hiroshima No Pika as "just another book about World War II." The author has a message; this view influences the presentation of the values and the story.

LITERARY RESPONSE SURVEY

THE POPULATION

In order to ascertain whether upper elementary readers were capable of identifying the issues in Hiroshima No Pika, an informal survey was conducted to record literary responses to this book. Twenty fifth graders from a semi-rural Nebraska school district completed a general survey after hearing and looking at the illustrations from Hiroshima No Pika. The children were not given any historical or scientific background information prior to hearing the story. Before the oral reading of the story by this author, the children were told Maruki's name and informed that she was from Japan.

Later in eastern Michigan, fifteen veterans from varied branches of the armed services who served in different years and arenas volunteered to also listen to and respond to this book. Before the reading of the book by this author, the men were told Maruki's name and informed that she was from Japan; they were not told of the book's contents prior to hearing it. After listening to the story, three World War II veterans left the room refusing to complete the survey.

THE SURVEY

1. Write 1 sentence about or related to the story.
2. Write 1 question about or related to the story.
3. What is the bias brought out in this book?
4. What is the best age or grade for a reader of this book? Why?

(Prior to hearing Hiroshima No Pika, the adults and youngsters completed this same survey in relation to the nursery rhyme "Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater" in an effort to make sure they understood the procedure. A discussion regarding "bias" was also conducted to assure all had a common definition for the concept.)

THE RESPONSES

Write 1 sentence about or related to the story.

The fifth graders commented about the inappropriateness of the bombing: "I thought it was very cruel without no meaning to drop the bomb." (The reasons why the United States dropped the bomb were not cited in the story.) Some answers reflected egocentric reactions: "I wouldn't like this to happen to me." Other comments centered on emotional responses to the story: "I am sorry for the poor people who were killed." Four youngsters stated that Hiroshima No Pika was a sad story. Finally one child noted that "I wish Japan and the USA were friends."

These comments showed that the children were influenced by Maruki's anti-war sentiments. Their responses indicated that they were operating without an appropriate historical perspective and that the story did not provide enough of a backdrop of information for their full understanding of the event. The children did not realize that Japan and the United States were friendly in the 1980's when the book was published.

Of the adults that filled out the survey, a World War II vet forcefully noted that "it was an accident that the country asked for it!" A veteran of the bombing of Pearl Harbor stated that "I

feel that this action by our government was necessary to save American lives." Another man who served in the South Pacific during World War II stated "As a veteran, I felt glad that it was the U.S. and not Japan dropping the bomb on us." The men made comments about Pearl Harbor, the Batan death march. The Vietnam War era veteran noted that "this [bomb] was uncalled for."

The servicemen responding to the story were definitely calling on prior knowledge and experiences that went beyond the literal scope of what was provided in the text of the story. The World War II vets held the position that the bombing was called for. The two vets from the Vietnam War era seemed to be less forceful in the defense of the action; one commented that "it was not fair to all the people."

Write 1 question about or related to the story.

Some of the children aimed their questions at moral issues Maruki presented: "Why would they kill the people instead of the soldiers?" "Why do people have to have war with nuclear bombs?" The youngsters inferred a need to know information not found in the story: "What started the fight?" "Why did they drop the bomb?" "Why did Japan bomb Pearl Harbor in the first place?" The children were also concerned about life after the bomb: "How did the people that are alive today live so long?" "How did they get food to eat?" Their questions reflected a certain curiosity about the event and certain value judgments made about the bombing.

The adults had markedly different responses. A World War II veteran queried "Why bring back bad memories and actions that weren't necessary?" The survivor of the Pearl Harbor bombing questions "Why do we read stories about Japan that make us feel guilty?" Another World War II vet asked "What do you expect from the American public?" A navy veteran of the Atlantic theater inquired "What about the men in The Arizona?" Quite clearly, prior knowledge came into play when the men were posing their responses to this section of the survey. Their

questions demanded a sense of justice for the Americans be considered when readers react to the story and message as Maruki presented them.

What is the bias brought out in this book?

The fifth graders provided vague answers for this question. "Against it" was supplied by seven youngsters with no specific reference given for "it." Additional responses included "doesn't like the war" (4 comments), "unhappy about the bombing" (2), "against the bomb" (2), and "interested in history" (2). Only two references were made about the United States: "the U.S. didn't care about the people in Japan" and "the U.S. isn't the only one you should feel sorry for." The youngsters were quick to point out the emotional bias of the story: "The author hated it," "feel very bad," "it's terrible to have a war," and "it's cruel." The consensus of the fifth graders appeared to be that the author was anti-war rather than anti-the-United States.

Again, the men responded in a different manner. One man who was in the service from 1959-1975 wrote "war is hell." A World War II veteran commented that the bias was "power seeking by politicians and business people." A World War II Air Force veteran stated that "they worried about the Japan pop. [population] and not the American population." A Korean War veteran stated "that peace is the only answer." One Vietnam War veteran asked "Why should it be me? [This] is against atomic bombing."

What is the best age or grade reading for this book?

"All ages" was the most frequent response. The fifth graders rationalized that "it's not just for kids it's something that everyone should read," "it's egicational [sic]," and "to make them understand more about wars." Five youngsters recommended a readership of fifth graders or older "so the little kids won't worry," "second graders won't understand," and "it's sad." A few fifth graders cited some concern as to whether or not young readers would have the appropriate vocabulary and historical and scientific background to understand the book. The students

cautioned that younger children would not comprehend what happened in the story. Interestingly enough, adults voiced the same concern about this book.

A veteran of the fighting in the South Pacific in World War II noted that "if the listener is too young to read then they should not be reading this book." The Korean War veteran commented "[age] 6 because their life is short enough without introducing them to death and misery at an early age." A Navy veteran of World War II stated "[age] 7 or older [because] at this age a fantasy, older age a reality." The Air Force veteran replied in a similar manner saying "any age because children would think it was a fantasy." In general, the men agreed that between the ages of 7 through 10 appeared to be the appropriate age range for this book. Their rationales seemed to be based on their understanding of what children would be able to comprehend as young individuals.

FOR THE ADULTS: What additional comments do you have about the story?

The veterans had a number of comments to make upon reflection. The Navy veteran of World War II noted that "I still have a hard time accepting Orientals." The Korean War veteran said that it was "a sad unnecessary happening." The veteran of the bombing of Pearl Harbor noted "I believe that it portrays the horror of war and I hope that future generations are never exposed to it."

FOR THE ADULTS: If you had elementary school age children, would you read them this book? Why or why not?

A veteran who was in the service between 1970-1980 wrote "yes, see for yourself--bombing can be stopped." One man who served in Illinois in 1969 commented "yes, to let them know what a bad act war is and how unjust." A veteran of the Vietnam War said "yes, children should know, so they don't make the same mistake that the world did before." A Navy man who served in the Atlantic during World War II stated "yes, let them know the price of freedom but I

think there is a better way to teach children [than this book]." Another World War II veteran who served in Europe made the observation "yes, it would tell them how we saved the lives of many of our soldiers by the use of the bomb." Additional comments were made by a veteran of the South Pacific during World War II who wrote "yes, they should know the destruction, death, etc. that followed of [the] dropping [of] the Atomic Bomb on August 6, 1945 that for years to come, people will remember this occasion." The veterans did want the world to know what happened, but not from the Japanese point of view. Their discussion that followed their filling out the survey was centered on the Japanese bias brought out in the book and that American children should learn about this historical event from the American perspective.

DISCUSSION

The twenty fifth graders who responded to a general survey regarding Hiroshima No Pika were able to identify a number of pertinent moral and social issues. Their primary concern dealt with an anti-war position in general rather than the specific issues related to nuclear (dis)armaments. Their written comments illustrated how impressions and interpretations were altered or influenced by a lack of historical and scientific information.

In a discussion following the survey, the children were very solemn and thoughtful with their responses that indicated that they were quite aware of nuclear warfare. The fifth graders noted that Maruki's story was based on feelings and a need for survival. One boy said the book reminded him of what went on in Vietnam; his Dad did not speak about Vietnam because that made him sad.

The fifth graders felt they understood the issues concerning why people are against war and against the massive destruction of nuclear weapons. They reacted first to a sad story about a helpless family in the middle of a war then they reacted to the larger social issues and the use of a nuclear weapon. The adults reacted to Pearl Harbor and other involvements of the

Japanese during World War II then they reacted to the sad story of a girl and her family. It was quite evident that the adults were reading/responding from a "Top Down" frame of reference, where they brought a lot of information to the text while the children were reacting to the book in a "Bottom Up" way in that they largely depended on the text for their source of information. Thus responses were definitely influenced by prior knowledge and personal bias.

Hiroshima No Pika was a useful teaching tool because it led toward more avenues of exploration. After discussing the book the youngsters investigated the historical events leading up to the bombing of Hiroshima. A history major from the University of Nebraska pointed out some of the factors that had been omitted from the book. The college student explained how the president gave grave consideration to the outcome of the bombing; his moral decision was not taken lightly. The youngsters also learned that the Enola Gay, the B29 super fortress used to transport the atomic weapon, "the little boy," had been built in Nebraska. This piece of information was very sobering.

The classroom teacher involved the youngsters in a discussion related to what they knew about nuclear energy used for non-warfare purposes such as the generation of power and nuclear medicine. Finally the students learned about why nuclear waste was so controversial. By using a three member team-teaching approach, the youngsters were given a well rounded introduction to nuclear energy and (dis)armaments while also learning about literary analysis, history, and science at the same time.

CONCLUSION

In light of the current political climate, the exploration of moral and social values assigned to the scientific development of nuclear energy may necessarily become a reality required in social studies in the upper elementary grades. It is important that children learn about the facts and the pros and cons rather than become confused by the opinions and myths surrounding

nuclear energy. In any program examining nuclear energy, it is important for youngsters to think critically, understand the scientific process of producing nuclear energy, employ inquiry and problem solving skills.

While some of the moral issues may be beyond a concrete level of intellectual development of the upper elementary child, it is important that youngsters understand the processes employed when using nuclear energy so they do not blindly accept everything they see or hear about this scientific development. The greatest moral dilemma of all would be to have an uninformed population that cannot (or will not) analyze the issues surrounding and the (mis)use of nuclear energy and how it influences their lives.

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